

'Wake-up call for the world': Diaspora Iranians stand by Israel after attacks

The atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7 must serve as a reminder to the West that Tehran is the biggest state sponsor of terrorism, say exiled Iranians

Jonathan Harounoff

For many Iranians in the diaspora, Hamas' barbaric attack on southern Israel on October 7, in which at least 1,300 Israelis were killed and over 200 taken hostage, had the bloody fingerprints of the Islamic Republic of Iran all over it.

While the extent of Tehran's involvement in the October 7 attacks continues to be debated, with the Wall Street Journal reporting a day after the massacre that Iran was involved in planning the assault, there is little remains that the clerical regime has for decades been cultivating a sprawling network of proxy terror groups across the Middle East: from Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon to Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

Past attempts by five consecutive U.S. administrations to sanction 11 Iranian proxy groups have so far failed to curb the Islamic Republic's regional influence.

For Mayra Yazdani, an Iranian-American journalist based in northern Virginia who fled Iran in 2012, the Islamic Republic is unapassable and represents the greatest obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Negotiating with Tehran would not induce regional stability, especially while it continues to hide behind the violent actions of its proxies, she says. Rather, a post-ayatollah, democratic Iran brought about by the people of Iran is the surest way of securing lasting regional peace.

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"The international community has been too naive and weak toward the bloodthirsty regime in Tehran, even when we all witnessed the regime's barbaric crackdown on anti-regime protests not only in

While Mansouri believes that true change in Iran will ultimately come from within, the international community can still support Iranian activists in the diaspora who know how to weaken the regime. "That includes identifying and going after their funding sources; identifying regime officials and their relatives abroad; freezing assets; encouraging defections; tackling the companies who provide surveillance tech and weapons to the Islamic Republic; and providing VPNs and satellite internet to Iranians living in Iran," she says.

Palestinians stand to benefit from the fall of the Islamic Republic, too, argues Alireza Nader, an Iran and Middle East scholar based in Washington. "A lot of Iranians blame Hamas for Israeli and Palestinian civilian deaths," he says. "The European Union, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia can support this by [putting] the Revolutionary Guards on their terrorist blacklist," as it is in the United States.

'Iranians want regime change'

Leila Mansouri, an attorney and Iranian diaspora community leader based in London and Washington, says the Iranian people are the greatest victims of the regime, having been held "hostage" in their own country since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. "Now is a good time to remind the world that the majority of Iranians want regime change," Mansouri says. "The European Union, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia can support this by [putting] the Revolutionary Guards on their terrorist blacklist," as it is in the United States.



Left: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi speaking to a crowd gathered in support of Palestinians in Gaza, last week, in San Francisco, October 8.



Top: Counter-protesters outside the Israeli Embassy in San Francisco, last week.



Right: Demonstrators in Berlin (left) and Rome (right) protesting Hamas' death, last year.



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victim casualties," he says. More than 6,000 Israelis and Palestinians have now been killed since Hamas' assault on October 7.

"The fall of the Islamic Republic in Iran and the emergence of a free and democratic Iran will be the biggest contributors to peace in the Middle East," he adds. "The regime's fall will not only benefit the people of Iran, but the people of Israel and the Palestinians as well."

Expressing solidarity with Israeli victims of Hamas is only natural to many Iranians in the diaspora, given that they and Israel share a common adversary in the Islamic Republic. "Many Iranians in the diaspora are protesting alongside Israelis because they understand, deep in their bones, what Hamas is about,"

including the country's skyrocketing levels of inflation and unemployment.

"The people of Iran are tired of their nation's wealth being used to fund barbaric terrorist attacks, such as the recent atrocities in Israel," says Raviyani, an Iranian American Christian and grassroots activist based in Dallas, Texas.

"The people of Iran and the diaspora have firsthand experience with the regime's brutality, so when we saw the atrocities in Israel, many of us felt compelled to stand together with the people of Israel," she adds. Raviyani says that predating the Islamic Republic was the reign of Persian conqueror Cyrus the Great, whose accommodationist attitude toward the Jewish people is oftentimes pointed to as

mer morning show radio personality and artist based in San Francisco who fled Iran in 1978, has a personal connection to Israel. He explains that it was the only country that asked him to design murals in support of Iranian women in their fight for freedom last year. "When I put one of these murals up in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa or Nazareth, it sends a powerful message," Khalili says. "It shows the world that the Jews are siding with the freedom-fighting women of Iran against the Islamic Republic, the government that funds Hamas and Hezbollah."

"There are no murals supporting the Iranian women in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia or Qatar," he adds.

Jonathan Harounoff is a British journalist and director of communications at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America.

Indoctrination

Sana Ebrahimi, a Ph.D. student at the University of Illinois Chicago who was born and raised in Tehran, recalls in vivid detail the Islamic Republic's attempts to inculcate antisemitic conspiracies in Iran's youth from a young age. "Growing up in Iran, I observed firsthand how the Islamic Republic indoctrinates the young through the educational system, fostering not only hatred toward Israel but also toward Jewish people worldwide," Ebrahimi says.

"We cannot condone a system that operates akin to the Nazis. Hamas is a proxy of the Islamic Republic, and it has adopted similar values. We cannot support a regime that shows utter disregard for human life engaging in kidnapping, torture and the most heinous forms of murder. We refuse to stand with our oppressors."

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Emily Sharif, an Iranian American activist from Tennessee, highlights the importance of language when referring to the clerical leaders in Tehran, speaking of the "Islamic Republic in Iran" rather than "of Iran."

She adds that the regime's propagandistic attempts to turn Iranians against Israel backfired – including painting the flag of Israel on some of the main roads in Iran so that ordinary citizens step on it – especially since "it was the Israeli people who stood by Iranian last year as they mourned the death of their loved ones who were brutally murdered by the Islamic Republic in Iran."